
From the editor

THE PROFESSION OF PROFESSIONAL RELATING*

Social support, as we generally think of it, means some sort of resource within a social network that provides strength, energy, material goods, financial goods, or other physical or emotional commodities that assist in getting along in the world. Within nursing, we think of these resources as including those beyond what we or any other health care delivery group might offer—the family and friends within a person's life. However, in a society that fosters the use of experts and technology to solve an ever-increasing range of problems, we see an abundance of professional groups that increasingly sell, as a commodity, that which formerly was assumed to be given by and among family and friends.

The medical care system has developed an affinity for "medicalizing" more and more phenomena to legitimize the offering of services under the medical rubric. As gradually increasing numbers of social, human development, and psychological phenomena are medicalized, we find that we live within a world where it has become ordinary for a model of reductionistic science to be applied to phenomena for which there is no real goodness of fit. When we read about social support providing "inoculation" for stress, most of us barely wrinkle an eyebrow.

As genuine human relating becomes professionalized, feelings and deeply felt acts of caring become objectified. They are objects to be studied, dissociated from their context, open to voyeurism and other forms of exploitation. The time and energy that is spent on professionalized activities and gestures robs

time and energy that might be spent on deep and lasting human connections. Deep human connections do not have the trappings (or traps) of titles and status symbols, of contrived social manners, or of fees for service. Deep and lasting human connections are nurtured through a balance between solitude, time with intimate friends, connections with colleagues and acquaintances, and thoughtful participation in the world at large. The professionalization of relating creates the pitfall for us as nurses of increasingly becoming defined by relations with something external to the self, that is, external criteria and symbols that dissociate us from the richness of meaning inherent in genuine relating.

Becoming aware of the subtle but extremely dehumanizing and dangerous pitfalls of professional relating enables us to resist the traps inherent in substituting professionalized services for genuine social networks of relationship. As nurses, we need our own genuine networks of support for personal and collective well-being and growth. We can begin to know and to celebrate meanings of genuine relating in our own lives as individuals and as nurses. The insights we gain in our own relating will enable us to nurture genuine social networks among people in our communities.

—Peggy L. Chinn, PhD, FAAN
Editor

*This phrase, and many of the ideas underlying the thoughts I share here are from *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*, by Janice G. Raymond, Boston, Beacon Press, 1986, p. 161.